

# 1997 NFPA National Fire Escape Survey

Commissioned by the nonprofit  
National Fire Protection Association

October 1997



## National Fire Protection Association

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)  
One Batterymarch Park  
P.O. Box 9101  
Quincy, MA 02269-9101

[www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org)

Contact:  
Julie Reynolds / Susan Siegel-McKelvey  
Public Affairs Division  
(617) 984-7275

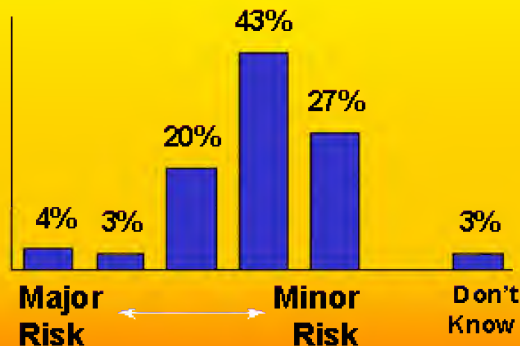
# Fire And Risk Of Fire In The Home

Base: 500

**Ever Had Fire In Home Where  
Fire Department Responded?**



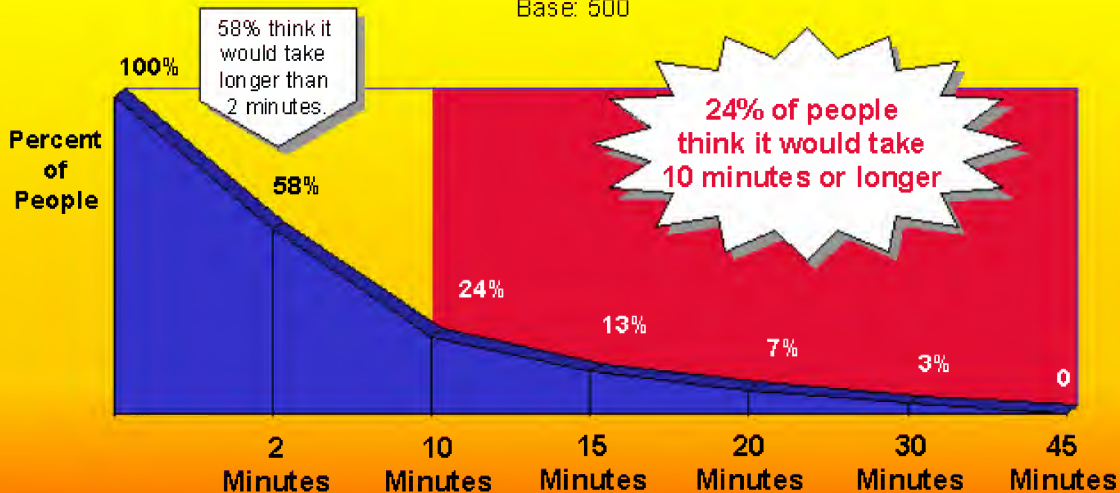
**How Much Risk Of  
Fire In The Home?**



- Despite the fact that 16% have had a fire in their home where the fire department responded, most people believe the risk of fire in their home to be only relatively minor.
- A small percentage of people believe themselves to be at major risk of a fire in their home.

# How Long After A Fire Starts In Living Room, Conditions In Bedroom Would Be Deadly

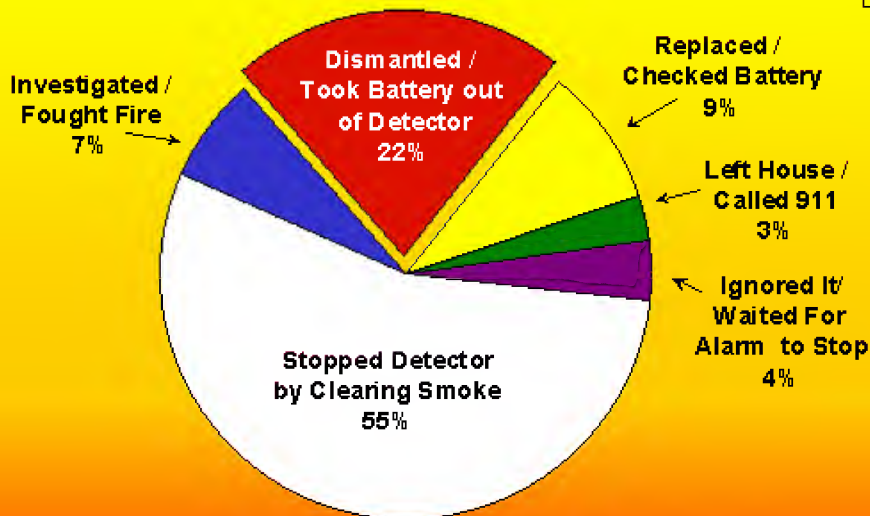
Base: 500



- 42% of people believe a living room fire could produce life-threatening conditions in a bedroom in 2 minutes or less; that's a realistic view.
- 24% believe they will have 10 minutes or more before life-threatening conditions develop; this is very unrealistic and suggests a dangerous lack of urgency.
- Home fires can grow fast enough to kill everyone in the home in a just a few minutes.

# *First Action When Smoke Detector Went Off*

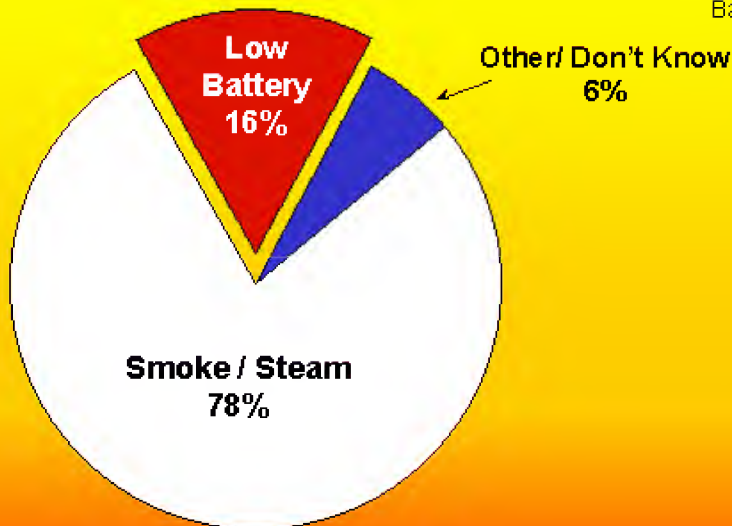
Base: 184



- More than one out of every five (22%) people stopped their smoke alarm by dismantling it. This is extremely dangerous, even if a real fire did not exist. After dismantling, people run the risk of accidentally or purposely leaving the detector dismantled. The ramifications to this are obvious; if a real fire *does* start, the smoke detector will not warn anyone of the imminent danger.

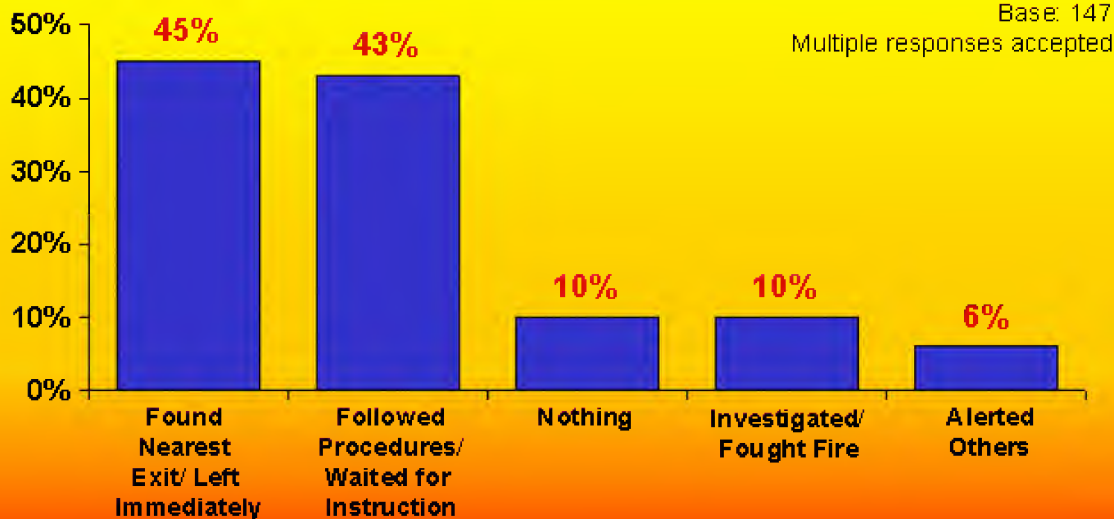
## ***Reason Smoke Detector Went Off***

Base: 184



- 16% of people reported that their smoke detector went off because of a low battery. Unless such nuisance alarms are reminders to homeowners that new batteries are needed, the smoke detector may not alert household members if a fire does occur.

# Response To A Fire Alarm In A Public Place



- 29% of people have been in a public place when an alarm went off. Of these, less than half (45%) found the nearest exit and left immediately.
- Two especially disturbing responses include one in ten (10%) who investigated or fought the fire and another 10% who decided to do nothing.

# Have A Plan To Follow In Event Of A Fire

Base: 500

**YES**  
HAVE A PLAN

**53%**

## Ever Practiced Plan

**YES**  
HAVE  
PRACTICED

**31%**

**NO**  
HAVE NOT  
PRACTICED

**69%**

## Why Not?

Never thought about it	27%
Plan is easy / no need to	21%
Don't have time / too lazy	10%
Live alone / only with adult	10%
Building is easy to get out of	8%
Too dangerous / destructive	8%
Not necessary	3%
Don't Know	10%

**NO**  
DO NOT HAVE A PLAN

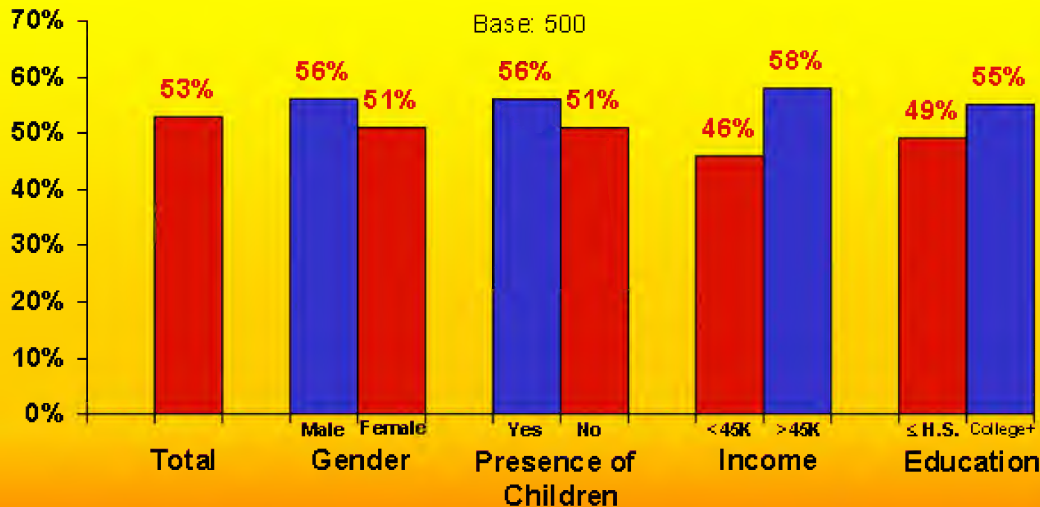
**47%**

## Why Not?

Never thought about it	55%
Live alone / only with adult	12%
Building is easy to get out of	9%
Don't have time / too lazy	4%
Try to avoid thinking about it	2%
All others	6%
Don't Know	13%

Over half of these people (51%)  
have three or more people  
currently living in the household.

# Have A Plan To Follow In Event Of A Fire



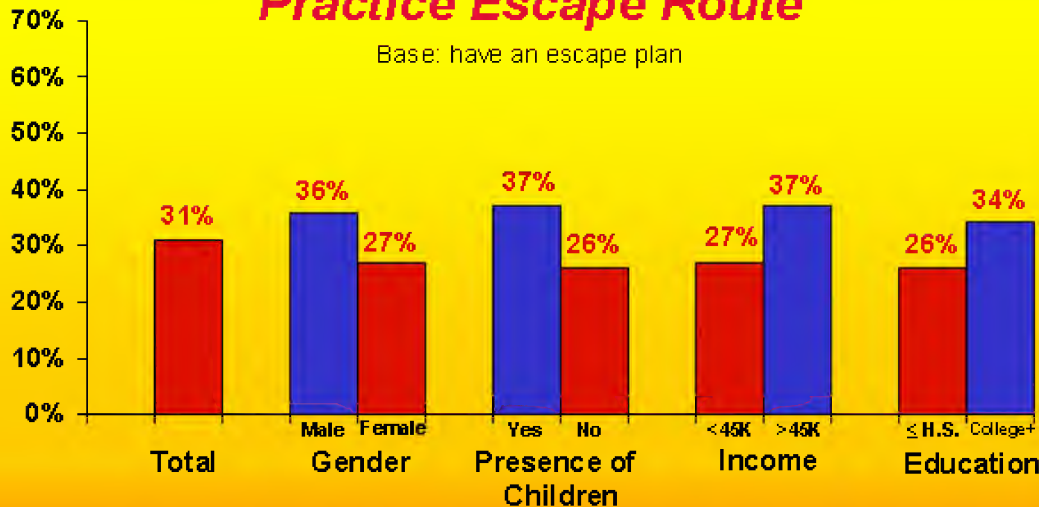
Only about half (53%) of all people have a escape plan.

- ▶ Males are slightly more likely than females to have one.
- ▶ People in homes with children are more likely to have a plan than those without.
- ▶ People with household incomes of at least \$45,000 a year are more likely than those with less to have a plan.
- ▶ People who have attended college are more likely to have an escape plan than those with a high school diploma or less.



## Practice Escape Route

Base: have an escape plan



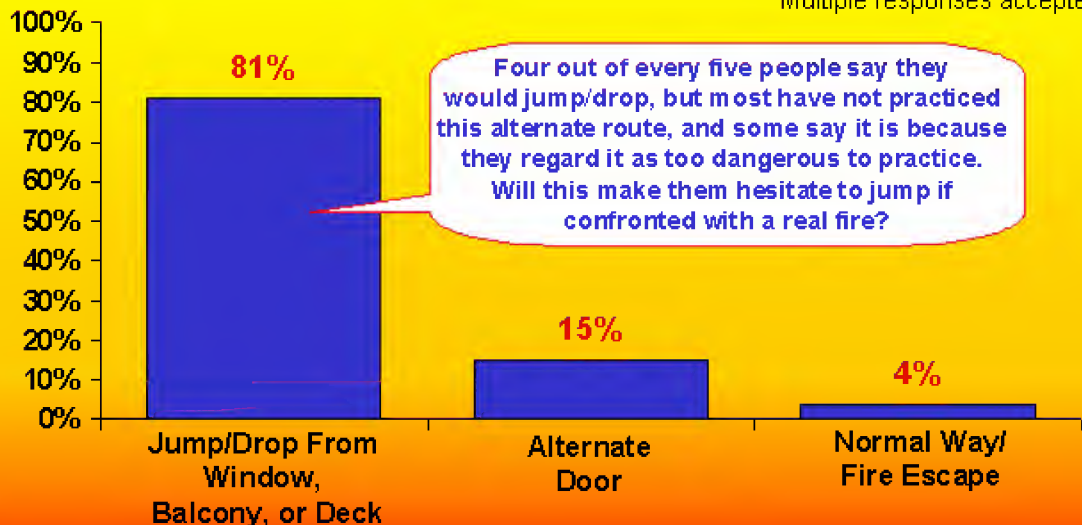
Of those who have a plan, 31% have practiced it. This means that overall, only 16% of people have developed *and practiced* an escape plan.

- ♣ Males are more likely than females to have practiced their plan.
- ♣ Homes with children are more likely to have practiced than those without.
- ♣ People with household incomes of at least \$45,000 a year are more likely than those with less to have practiced.
- ♣ People who have attended college are more likely to have practiced their escape plan than those with a high school diploma or less.

# How To Get Out Of Home If Normal Route Blocked

Base: 500

Multiple responses accepted



- 15% say they will go to an alternate door. Have these people considered what they will do if fire blocks their path to all doors, as can easily happen to occupants in upper-floor bedrooms?

# Whether Identified Alternate Escape Route

Base: have an escape plan - 264

**YES**  
HAVE ALTERNATE PLAN

**72%**



## Ever Practiced Alternate Plan

**YES**  
HAVE  
PRACTICED

**29%**

**NO**  
HAVE NOT  
PRACTICED

**71%**



## Why Not?

Never thought about it	25%
Plan is easy / no need to	20%
Too dangerous / destructive	13%
Live alone / only with adult	10%
Building is easy to get out of	10%
Don't have time / too lazy	4%
Not necessary	4%
Don't Know	10%

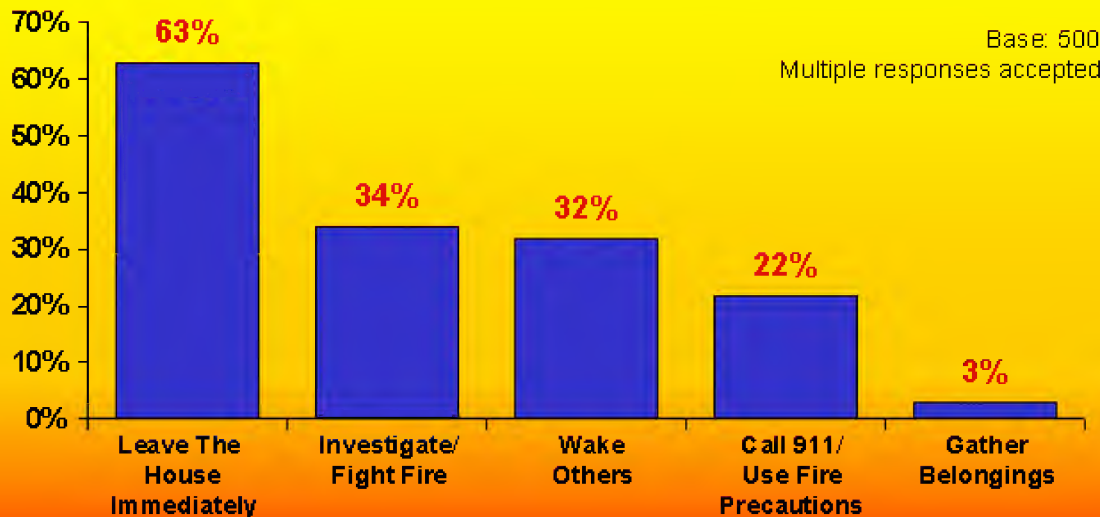
**NO**  
DO NOT HAVE ALTERNATE PLAN

**28%**

- Slightly more than seven out of every ten (72%) people with an escape plan also have an alternate escape route identified.
- However, less than 30% of these plans have ever been practiced.
- Overall, the percentage of people with an alternate escape plan that they have practiced is 11%.
- The same excuses given for not practicing the primary escape plan were again heard for reason why the alternate plan was not practiced.

## **Response to Hypothetical Situation:**

### **Alarm Goes Off in the Middle of the Night and Smell Smoke**



- Many people don't know that the time to go is when the detector sounds. Seconds count, especially at home, where most fatal fires occur. Investigating / fighting the fire or gathering belongings are dangerous actions that could waste the time margin that safety detectors provide.